

Organizational Analysis: Navy Seals

Executive Summary

The U.S. Army established the U.S. Navy SEALs in 1962 to adapt to the newest warfare concepts that were learned in Korea and Cuba. Displaying the key characteristics of a learning organization, the Navy SEALs have accumulated their expertise by both trial-and-error and using the existing tacit knowledge that was present in the other departments of the U.S. Army such as the Underwater Demolition Teams. The swift establishment of the Navy SEALs was a product of both strong sponsorship of the president and the external political pressure that the country was in (e.g. Vietnam War, the rise of the communist regime in Cuba etc.). The success of the Navy SEALs was a result of their early 'market-entry', a concept that is used frequently in business to illustrate the importance of being the first in an environment to adapt and employ the newest changes, in this case the new warfare concepts, to gain competitive edge. Throughout their history, the Navy SEALs have maintained the highest quality of personnel through intense selection and training programs to maintain their reliability for the U.S. Army.

Today's organizational structure of the Navy SEALs is designed around the latest organizational design concepts that are currently being used by most Fortune 500 companies. For example, Navy SEALs are organized in highly differentiated and decentralized units that can be further broken into smaller groups to achieve the desired mobility required by an operation. Since the external environment is highly unstable and complex, Navy SEALs' decision mechanism is also very horizontal, while the organization's culture and main objectives are communicated in a vertical structure.

Navy SEALs have performed in numerous operations that were considered critical to the success of the parent organization, making them highly valuable and influential for the U.S. Army. Although most of these operations were conducted in high confidentiality, some success and failure stories were shared in public, which can be used to analyze the application of organizational design principles to Navy SEALs. Through the inspection of the three cases analyzed in this report, adaptiveness, high differentiation and professionalism were observed to be the key features of success while lack of communication was identified as the main weakness of Navy SEALs.

Today, Navy SEALs are considered to be one of the most innovative organizations in the world due to their agile organizational structure that permits them to change and improve constantly. Through applying practices such as Lean Manufacturing, Navy SEALs are able to minimize the waste in their organization to achieve the highest performance with the least amount of resources, and lead as an example for the organizations by demonstrating that any organization can benefit from the application of innovative organizational theories